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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: priority theme: initiation of the overall review of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit

Statement submitted by the Foundation for the Rights of the Family (PRODEFA), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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In his 1995 annual report on the work of the Organization, the Secretary-General of the United Nations referred to the importance of supporting families as an integral part of the efforts to achieve peace, human rights, democracy, sustainable development and social progress.

The seven conferences of the 1990s** enunciate the importance of the family for the growth and well-being of all its members, particularly children and youth, or identify objectives and actions of direct relevance to the family; they also point out the positive role that families could play in promoting respect, learning and practice of basic human rights.

* E/CN.5/1999/1.

** World Summit for Children, New York; United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro; World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna; International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo; World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen; Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing; United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul.

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The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo addresses family issues extensively. Its Programme of Action reaffirms the family as the basic unit of society and contains a full chapter on "The family, its roles, rights, composition and structure".

As to the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, the Conference in which this Commission is directly involved, the Copenhagen Declaration states that the goals and objectives of social development require continuous efforts to reduce and eliminate major sources of social distress and instability for the family and society. Both the Declaration and Programme of Action recognize the central role of the family in social integration and call for fostering policies that address various aspects of family life and promote equal partnership between women and men in the family, community life and society. The Declaration also emphasizes the shared responsibility of men and women in the care of children and in the support for ageing family members, and calls for men's active involvement in responsible parenthood and sexual and reproductive behaviour.

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There is an acute need for making basic social services available to all groups and families, particularly those deprived of what is basically necessary for everyday life.

Because of the great imbalance existing in the world, the concept of social services means one thing for industrialized countries and an altogether different thing for developing or weaker countries, where such basic services as shelter, food, water and urgent medical care are the primary concern.

Utter poverty and man-made and natural disasters — such as the great tragedy in Central America — break up entire families and destroy the social fabric.

The family, being the fullest reflection of the strength and weakness of society, offers a unique approach to social issues.

This is why a correct assessment of the progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action would be incomplete if it did not take into consideration the direct relationship existing between the family and a great number of social problems — poverty, drug addiction, illness, age and unemployment, among others.

A family perspective should also include issues relating to individual family members, inasmuch as the members of the family, considered individually, cannot develop fully if their natural context, the family, is lost sight of.

In its resolution 47/237, the General Assembly recommended various activities to follow up the International Year of the Family, 1994. It was decided that 15 May of every year should be observed as the International Day of Families and that two plenary meetings at its forty-ninth session, in 1994, would be devoted to the implementation of this follow-up. In the same resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to seek the views of States members of the Commission for Social Development on the desirability of working out a declaration on the role, responsibilities and rights of families on the occasion of the Year.

However, apart from these activities, no other steps have actually been taken towards a follow-up to the International Year of the Family.

Among other possibilities of action, there is a need to fill the now existing void by undertaking serious studies on the family, its functions, responsibilities, rights, forms and structures.